

Parenting classes promote healthy families across West

Salvation Army clients share the benefits of learning to be ‘mom and dad’

By Vivian Lopez –

With the joys of parenting come its challenges. Between the sleep deprivation and tantrums, parenthood can be hard. But it is not something you have to do on your own. Ample lessons can be learned from parent education classes, which many Salvation Army corps and facilities offer.



In fact, a study by the Oregon State University College of Public Health and Human Sciences and the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative indicated that parents have a lot to gain from such classes, especially those from low-income households. In addition to elevated parenting skills, attendance can also result in improved child behavior.

Alicia Reyes and her two kids have been living at The Salvation Army Door of Hope in San Diego, California, for almost a year. The campus offers parenting classes Wednesday evenings through a partnership with Social Advocates for Youth San Diego.

Reyes decided to attend the classes, and said it is something everyone at the Door of Hope should take advantage of.

“I’m very open to learning things, especially when it comes to the kids. It’s the promise I made myself when I became a mom,” Reyes said. “The classes teach you how to create stability, no matter what situation you are in.”



Major Stephanie Bridgeo (left), Salvation Army Caldwell corps officer, with Baby Haven graduates, as they proudly hold up their graduation certificates.

She has learned to be more patient and understanding, and how to communicate better with her children. The biggest lesson she takes away from the experience is to recognize if it is the parent or child who owns a problem when one arises.

Reyes said these lessons have improved her family dynamic at home.

“It’s just really changed us,” she said. “We communicate more.”

Megan Dowell, Door of Hope Director, emphasized the importance of offering such educational opportunities.

“We want to strengthen mothers, ensure stable and safe homes, and increase the health of children and their families,” Dowell said. “We hope that the parenting classes will not only provide our moms with strategies for the ups and downs of parenting, but also increase their confidence and self-efficacy.”

Reyes plans to start doing family meetings with her kids. She said she will also ask for an in-home visit provided through the program when she feels it’s necessary to keep things running smoothly in her home.

“I hope to stay focused and stay on track, especially using all the tools that I learned in the parenting classes from the Door of Hope,” Reyes said. “It’s very hands-on and I feel really lucky to have taken them.”

The Salvation Army Caldwell Corps’ Baby Haven program in Caldwell, Idaho, also offers parenting education courses for parents of kids age 2 and up, with individuals speaking on different topics. Eva Chavez, a mom of four, attends the classes regularly.

Chavez said despite already having an 8-year-old daughter, she has learned new things. She feels like she is more patient and understands her children more when they’re upset or have a problem.

“These classes help us to be better parents,” Chavez said. “If there weren’t programs available like this, then we would have to learn about parenting on our own. There’s some things you can’t learn at home.”



Volunteers talk to Booth Marian Pritchett School students during their life skills class.

Shannon Espinoza, an AmeriCorps VISTA program community developer working with The Salvation Army Caldwell Corps, said these parenting education courses give parents a sense of support.

“They don’t need to feel like they are alone,” Espinoza said. “We don’t come with a manual when we first start off as parents, so we try to give them as much parenting skills as possible that they can take

in.”

In addition to functioning as a high school for pregnant and parenting girls in grades 9–12, The Booth Marian Pritchett School in Boise, Idaho, offers prenatal and parenting classes every Wednesday.

During the parenting education classes, the students are broken up into groups to discuss different topics.

“By providing the parenting education to them, it’s offering them skills that they might not otherwise have access to,” said Lindsay Klein, Booth Marian Pritchett School social worker. “It’s also about peer support, and just being connected and the students realizing that they are not alone.”

Hailey Gantz, a Booth Marian Pritchett School student and single mother of one, said the classes help her a lot.

“They’ve shown me more about parenting than I expected there to be,” Gantz said. “I got an awakening of things I didn’t even think about that are going to happen and they prepare you for that.”

Gantz is more confident in her parenting and has realized that she doesn’t have to do everything alone.

“There’s people there to help me do it, and that made me more open to different ways of parenting,” she said. “Now that I’ve seen all the options, I know that I’m choosing the best for my daughter.”

She hopes to take everything she has learned, and implement it in her family as she moves forward.

“It makes it a lot easier when you’re not stressed out, and you have someone to talk to and ask these questions to when parenting gets hard,” Gantz said. “I definitely feel like I am a better parent.”